

[7th March, 2001]

RAJYA SABHA

(c) the cost of completion of the first prototype of the LCA; and what are the salient features of the Indian LCA; and

(d) whether the LCA was to have participated in the flypast on the inaugural day of the air show in Bangalore on February 7, 2001, but was withdrawn at the last minute due to a technical snag, if so, the nature of the snag and how it was removed?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) Yes, Sir. The maiden flight of first LCA Technology Demonstrator (TD-1) took place in Bangalore on January 4, 2001.

(b) Yes, Sir. The test flight was successful and met all the test parameters set for the flight.

(c) The expenditure incurred in the LCA programme upto December 31, 2000 was Rs. 1818.53 crore. LCA is an advanced technology, single seat, single engine, light weight, all weather, multi role air superiority fighter aircraft.

(d) Yes, Sir. During pre-flight built-in test an error signal was noticed. However, on analysis it was found that the error signal related to a non-safety critical 'snag'. Consequently, the aircraft was cleared for the flight and flew in the Air Show on Ninth February, 2001.

Commercial Production of MBT Arjun

†1176. SHRI D. P. YADAV: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are going to start production of major war tank named 'Arjun' on commercial basis, if so, by when; and

(b) whether even the Defence sector is being opened for Indian companies, if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) OFB has already embarked on the production of MBT Arjun tanks for the Indian Army and the first batch of complete tanks is scheduled for issue during the year 2003-2004.

(b) As per the existing industrial policy, manufacture of arms, ammunition and allied items of defence equipment, defence aircraft and warships is reserved for the public sector. At present non-lethal stores required by the Armed Forces

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

and raw materials, semi-finished products, components and sub-systems required by Ordnance Factories and Defence PSUs are being procured from the private sector. In the quest for self-reliance, the private sector shall continue to be associated in defence production, with suitable changes in policy and procedures to suit emerging requirements.

Copter crash near Vaishno Devi

1177. SHRI SWARAJ KAUSHAL:

SHRI K. B. KRISHNA MURTHY:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the copter Chetak involved in a crash near Vaishno Devi in the first week of February 2001, killing five army personnel, was on an official sortie; if so, what are the details of the crash;

(b) whether Government have seen the contradictory reports in the Press suggesting that the visit of a top ranking army official with his escort entourage to Vaishno Devi shrine was of a personal nature; and

(c) whether Government have taken disciplinary action or conducted any probe into the matter and if so, the findings thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) Yes, Sir. The Chetak helicopter which crashed near Vaishno Devi shrine on 30th January, 2001, was on an authorised official sortie ordered by HQ Northern command to undertake the mission in support of Army Commander's visit to an operational location within his area of jurisdiction.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) A court of Inquiry to investigate all aspects of the accidents has been ordered and its findings are awaited.

Recruitment in Defence Forces From Tamil Nadu

1178. SHRI CHO S. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a proposal to raise additional recruits in Defence Forces from Tamil Nadu;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the recruitments from there is less in comparison to other States;